

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ERDA-05 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 CIAE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-08 OMB-01 /079 W
-----231903Z 059512 /41

R 231746Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1891
SECDEF
INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USCINCEUR
USNMR SHAPE
CINCUSAREUR
CINCUSNAVEUR
CINCUSAFE
USDOCOSOUTH
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: UK, MPOL, NATO
SUBJECT: HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE ON 1977 DEFENSE
ESTIMATES
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REF: LONDON 4567; LONDON 3478; LONDON 3377;
LONDON 621

SUMMARY: THE DEFENSE DEBATE OPENED ON 22 MARCH AGAINST
THE BACKGROUND OF THE OPPOSITION'S MOTION OF NO CONFI-
DENCE TO BE VOTED ON THE FOLLOWING DAY -- THEREBY POST-

PONING THE SECOND DAY OF DEBATE UNTIL 28 MARCH.
OPENING FOR THE GOVERNMENT, SECRETARY MULLEY DEFENDED
THE DEFENSE CUTS ANNOUNCED EARLIER AND ARGUED THAT
THE WHITE PAPER ON DEFENSE REAFFIRMED THE GOVERNMENT'S
DETERMINATION TO MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL UK CONTRIBUTION TO
NATO. SIR IAN GILMOUR (OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE)
SPEAKING FOR THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION CLAIMED THAT
THE GOVERNMENT'S POOR PERFORMANCE ON DEFENSE GAVE COM-
PELLING REASONS FOR MULLEY TO RESIGN -- "TO MAKE A
DIGNIFIED EXIT SHORTLY BEFORE THE REST OF HIS GOVERN-
MENT AND HE SHOULD CERTAINLY TAKE IT." GILMOUR PLEDGED
TO RESTORE THE PROPER FIGHTING CAPABILITY OF BRITAIN'S
FRONT-LINE FORCES WHEN THE CONSERVATIVES RETURNED TO
POWER. DESPITE A VIGOROUS ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT'S
DEFENSE CUTS, GILMOUR REFUSED TO SAY HOW MUCH THE
CONSERVATIVES WOULD SPEND ON DEFENSE AND EXACTLY ON
WHAT AND WHERE THEY WOULD SPEND IT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE TWO-DAY DEFENSE DEBATE ON THE STATEMENT ON
THE DEFENSE ESTIMATES FOR 1977 WAS OPENED ON 22 MARCH
BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE FRED MULLEY WHO
MOVED A TAKE NOTE MOTION AS FOLLOWS: "THAT THIS
HOUSE TAKES NOTE OF THE STATEMENT ON THE DEFENSE
ESTIMATES 1977 (COMMAND PAPER NO. 6735); AND ENDORSES
HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF BASING BRITISH
SECURITY ON COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO DETER AGGRESSION,
WHILE SEEKING EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO REDUCE TENSION
THROUGH INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS ON ARMS CONTROL AND
DISARMAMENT."

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2. THE DEFENSE DEBATE OPENED AT A TIME WHEN THE MINDS
OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT VERY OBVIOUSLY WERE ON MATTERS
SOMEWHAT WEIGHTIER THAN WHAT PROMISED TO BE A REPEAT
PERFORMANCE OF THE JANUARY DEBATE ON UK DEFENSE SPENDING
(LONDON 401, 500 AND 621). THE ATTENTION OF THE HOUSE
WAS ON THE WHEELING AND DEALING GOING ON IN ANTICIPA-
TION OF THE CONFIDENCE MOTION AND THERE WERE ONLY SIX
BACKBENCHERS BEHIND MULLEY THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF
HIS OPENING STATEMENT. ON THE OPPOSITION SIDE THE TURN-
OUT WAS SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER AND THERE WAS MUCH
JOLLITY, BANTER AND LAUGHTER.

3. MULLEY'S PERFORMANCE WAS ADEQUATE TO THE OCCASION
AND HE SPOKE LIKE A MINISTER WHO KNEW HE WAS WALKING
A WELL-TROD PATH. HE RECITED THE NOW FAMILIAR ARGUMENTS
FOR DEFENDING DEFENSE CUTS, MAKING THE POINT THAT "THE
RELATIVE BURDEN WHICH EACH NATO MEMBER BORE FOR THE
COMMON DEFENSE SHOULD NOT AND COULD NOT BE IMMUTABLE."

IT WAS INESCAPABLE THAT DEFENSE, LIKE ALL OTHER PUBLIC EXPENDITURE "MUST BE CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR GENERAL ECONOMIC SITUATION. THIS WAS WHY THE GOVERNMENT HAD GIVEN OVERWHELMING PRIORITY TO THE TASKS OF INDUSTRIAL REGENERATION AND FIGHTING INFLATION ON WHICH OUR FUTURE DEPENDS." MULLEY EMPHASIZED THAT THE UK'S ALLIES HAD SHOWN "UNDERSTANDING" OF BRITAIN'S NEED TO REDUCE DEFENSE EXPENDITURE AND HE ASSERTED THAT

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1892

SECDEF

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USCINCEUR

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"THEY UNDERSTAND THE GOVERNMENT'S FIRM COMMITMENT TO NATO AND OUR DETERMINATION TO PLAY AS FULL A PART IN ITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEFENSE AS OUR ECONOMY ALLOWS."

4. MULLEY REAFFIRMED HMG'S DETERMINATION "IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR ALLIES" TO WORK TOWARD REDUCTIONS IN THE LEVEL OF NUCLEAR AND CONVENTIONAL ARMAMENTS "BY INTER-

5. ON THE THREAT MULLEY SAID THERE IS "... NO IMMINENT RISK OF AGGRESSION BY THE WARSAW PACT." HE ARGUED THAT DETERRENCE WAS STILL WORKING AND THAT IT DID NOT REQUIRE "... THAT NATO MATCHED THE CONVENTIONAL STRENGTH OF THE WARSAW PACT EITHER GLOBALLY OR IN PARTICULAR AREAS." IT DID REQUIRE THAT NATO MAINTAINED "... SUFFICIENT FORCES TO DETER AGGRESSION: TO MAKE IT CLEAR TO THE OTHER SIDE THAT NO EASY VICTORIES COULD BE WON AND THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO BRING MILITARY PRESSURE TO BEAR INVOLVED INCALCULABLE RISKS." MULLEY CONTINUED BY MAKING THE POINT THAT INCREASES IN SOVIET STRENGTH DID NOT REQUIRE "... EXACTLY MATCHING INCREASES IN NATO'S FORCES, BUT THAT THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE FORCES ON EITHER SIDE SHOULD NOT BECOME SUCH THAT THE RISKS INVOLVED IN AGGRESSION WERE DIMINISHED OR THAT THE NUCLEAR THRESHOLD WAS SIGNIFICANTLY LOWERED."

6. ON THE ISSUE OF A NEW UK-FRG OFFSET FOR BAOR, MULLEY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE COSTS OF MAINTAINING BRITISH FORCES HAD INCREASED TO 544 MILLION POUNDS PER ANNUM BECAUSE OF THE FALL IN THE VALUE OF STERLING. MULLEY REJECTED A LEFT-WING DEMAND BY GWILYN ROBERTS (LAB, CANNOCK) THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO REACH AN OFFSET AGREEMENT WITH THE FRG WOULD BE TO THREATEN THE PROGRESSIVE WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH TROOPS UNTIL AGREEMENT WAS REACHED. MULLEY SAID SUCH A COURSE WOULD NOT BE SATISFACTORY OR SUCCESSFUL.

7. ON NATO AEW MULLEY MADE A LENGTHY STATEMENT REPORTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SEPTTEL (LONDON 4787).

8. FOR THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION, SIR IAN GILMOUR (SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE) OPENED BY NEEDLING THE GOVERNMENT FOR GETTING THE MOTION "WITH TRADITIONAL INCOMPETENCE AND TRICKINESS" ON THE ORDER PAPER ONLY THE NIGHT BEFORE. HE NOTED, SARCASTICALLY, THAT EVEN THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT APPROVE OF THEIR WHITE PAPER FOR THEY WERE ONLY ASKING THE HOUSE "TO TAKE NOTE OF IT." SIR IAN DID NOT BLAME THEM, BUT IT WAS "THE FIRST TIME SUCH A MOTION HAD APPEARED SINCE 1950." THE MOTION, HE SAID, IN TALKING ABOUT COLLECTIVE EFFORT MEANT "THE EFFORT OF BRITAIN'S ALLIES." THE MOTION WAS UNSATISFACTORY TO THE HOUSE "BUT IS APPROPRIATE TO THE WHITE PAPER . . . AN ARID DOCUMENT AND PREDICTABLY SO."

9. SIR IAN ACCUSED MINISTERS OF "FIDDLING THE BOOKS". AND OF TRYING TO CONCEAL THE DAMAGE THEY HAD DONE TO BRITAIN'S DEFENSE. HE STRESSED THAT THE RECENT ALL-PARTY DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT (LONDON 4567) IS A "SHOCKING INDICTMENT" OF THE GOVERNMENT AND OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE. SIR IAN SAID THE REPORT "SHOT TO PIECES" MULLEY'S ARGUMENT ABOUT TEETH AND TAIL AND SHOWED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN TRYING TO DECEIVE THE NATION ABOUT THE FACTS OF THE CUTS INFLICTED ON THE

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FORCES. GILMOUR CALLED FOR MULLEY'S RESIGNATION WHICH,
HE SAID, WAS A 'PROPER COURSE IN JANUARY" AND THAT IS
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STILL TRUE.

10. THE WHITE PAPER SUFFERED FROM AN "ADVANCED STATE
OF SCHIZOPHRENIA." PARTS OF IT RELATED THE SOVIET
THREAT "FAIRLY AND EVEN STARKLY" BUT THERE WERE ALSO
"PASSAGES OF INSPIRED IDIOCY, PRESUMABLY CONTRIBUTED
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE OR OTHER MINISTERS." SIR IAN
WENT ON TO SAY "THE COLLECTOR'S PIECE IN THE WHITE
PAPER IS A PARAGRAPH THAT SAYS THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO
SUGGEST THAT NATO'S POLICY OF DETERRENCE WAS FAILING
AND THAT THE WARSAW PACT WAS CONTEMPLATING AGGRESSION
AGAINST NATO."

11. SIR IAN PROMISED THAT THE CONSERVATIVES "WOULD
RESTORE DEFENSE TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE AS THE PRIME
TASK OF GOVERNMENT." HE SAID THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD
SPEND MORE ON DEFENSE BUT HE REFUSED TO BE SPECIFIC
AS "IT WOULD BE FOLLY FOR AN OPPOSITION TO COMMIT
ITSELF TO A DETAILED DEFENSE POLICY.'. HE SAID EARLIER,
HOWEVER, THAT "CONSERVATIVES STRONGLY BELIEVED THAT
THE DEFENSE BUDGET SHOULD BE ASSESSED IN THE LIGHT
OF THE PERCEIVED THREAT TO NATIONAL AND NATO SECURITY."

12. SIR HARWOOD HARRISON (CHAIRMAN OF THE DEFENSE
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE EXPENDITURE COMMITTEE) SAID
THAT HIS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT (LONDON 4567) WAS WRITTEN
BEFORE THE WHITE PAPER WAS PUBLISHED AND THAT THERE IS

NOTHING IN THE WHITE PAPER WHICH WOULD HAVE MADE
MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE "ALTER THEIR MINDS."

13. ALAN LEE WILLIAMS (CHAIRMAN OF THE LABOR PARTY
DEFENSE COMMITTEE) SAID HE IS UNHAPPY WITH "PIECEMEAL
DEFENSE CUTS.'. HE SAID DEFENSE IS SO IMPORTANT IT
MUST HAVE "A HIGHER PRIORITY IN EXPENDITURE. THE
SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT IS A HIGHLY DAMAGING ASSESSMENT
OF PRESENT DEFENSE CAPABILITY."
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14. THE DEFENSE DEBATE CONTINUES ON 28 MARCH.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Drafter: n/a
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Errors: N/A
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Office: ACTION EUR
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Original Previous Classification: n/a
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